

REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ON NEED TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AT CHICAGO INS

CHICAGO, IL U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today testified before a Congressional committee about the need to improve customer service at the Chicago Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office. She also discussed issues relating to women asylum seekers, detention centers and the need to closely review the process regarding the issuance of medical and disability waivers.

The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims held a field hearing in Chicago at the request of members of the Illinois delegation to examine what Schakowsky calls the "culture of the customer is always wrong" at the Chicago INS.

"Today's hearing is an opportunity for members of the Committee to explore first-hand the issues and problems facing immigrants who seek service at the Chicago INS office. For too long, customers at the Chicago INS have been treated with disrespect, callousness, and hostility and have endured long lines, unprepared staff, and years of waiting to determine the status of their cases. This hearing will put the Chicago INS on notice that the customer should always come first," Schakowsky said.

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She added, "I want to thank Judiciary Committee Chairmen Henry Hyde and members of the Subcommittee for their commitment to find ways for the Chicago INS to better serve Chicago's immigrant community. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the Chicago INS to implement comprehensive, long-term improvements."

Since taking office in January, Schakowsky has led the charge to ensure that customers at the Chicago INS receive the quality service they deserve. "These legal residents are customers who pay high fees and they deserve to be treated with respect," she said.

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The Chicago INS office has begun to implement measures put forth by Schakowsky to help decrease the line at 10 W. Jackson. However, Schakowsky called for further steps to be taken.

Attached is a list of □ these measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT THE INS CHICAGO OFFICE

Eliminate the "customer is always wrong" culture.

Increase the number of permanent staff available to serve customers.

Increase capacity so that all customers visiting will receive service, not just the first 600.

Have information officers available from at least 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Re-examine Friday office closings and explore the feasibility of expanding hours of operation to include some evenings and weekends.

Shorten the overall processing time for applications.

Revisit guard presence and the x-ray procedure.

Actively work to expand partnerships with government agencies and ethnic community organizations to ensure the wider availability of forms.

Ensure phone lines are open, available and answered in a timely and accurate manner.

Provide mandatory training to staff that includes cultural/diversity, sensitivity and a focus on the delivery of quality customer service.

Increase supervisory presence throughout the office, especially in areas with high customer interactions.

Provide special training for adjudicators dealing with medical and disability waivers.

Make the interview process more welcoming.

Eliminate the use of arbitrary questions.

Maintain compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Asylum seekers and their children should not be separated.

Provide adequate detention facilities for women.

Implement Know Your Rights Presentations at all jails and detention centers.